

Buffer compliance on track ahead of November deadline



A milkweed buffer in Koochiching County enhances wildlife habitat and water quality. Photo Credit: James Aasen, Koochiching SWCD



The results of a July 2018 buffer progress reporting deadline show that Minnesota landowners are well on their way to full compliance with the state's riparian buffer law. The Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) continues to see increased compliance on both public waters and public ditches in advance of the November 1 compliance deadline for public ditches.

The buffer law was signed into law in 2015 and further clarified in 2016. It aims

to enhance protection of Minnesota's water resources, primarily through the installation of riparian buffers. A buffer, AKA filter strip, is vegetated land adjacent to a stream, river, lake or wetland. Buffers help filter out phosphorus, nitrogen and sediment. They are an important conservation practice for helping keep water clean. In some situations, alternative practices will provide comparable water-quality benefits and may be more appropriate to fit

site conditions and land management goals.

The deadline for public waters was Nov. 1, 2017. Waivers were granted to a number of landowners seeking further technical assistance in determining the best compliance option for their land. The waiver process provides flexibility for landowners, especially in cases where alternative practices may be the best option to improve water quality on a particular site.

Public waters compliance now sits at 98.5 percent, a 1 percent increase from fall 2017 reporting. In addition, there are at least 2,300 remaining waivers documented that when factored in put the state at around 99 percent compliance. Of Minnesota's 87 counties, 76 are over 90 percent compliant and 62 are over 95 percent compliant. All Minnesota counties are more than 80 percent compliant for public waters.

Preliminary Public ditches compliance is currently 76 percent. As the November 1 deadline approaches, landowners have options for reaching compliance. They can implement their buffer or alternative

practice plans on their own, while keeping their local Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) informed of their plans and progress toward the upcoming deadline. Landowners may also choose to work directly with their local SWCD to look at alternative practices or filter strip plans to bring their properties into compliance.

Soil and Water Conservation Districts continue to play an essential role in assisting landowners throughout the implementation process.

